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AUTHOR Moore, Zena; English, Mark
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the experiences and behavior of eight African American students participating in an experimental Arabic second language course in an inner city middle school. Data were drawn from student and teacher journals and two videotaped class sessions, one in an early stage and one in a late stage of the two-semester course. Analysis focused on how the class met the comparison goal of the recent national standards for foreign language learning. The study gathered information on students reasons for learning foreign languages in general and Arabic in particular, growth in student awareness of cultural differences between their native (American) and Arabic cultures, student learning styles, classroom dynamics, transfer of linguistic knowledge from one language to the other, use of students as peer teachers, and students' ability to apply learned materials in real-life situations. Student progress during the course of the class is summarized, and the teacher's reflections on his experience are included. It is concluded that the extensive cultural information presented in the class made the students' language learning experience more meaningful. Contains 43 references. (MSE)

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ED 414 723

Linguistic and Cultural Comparisons: Middle School African American Students Learning Arabic

Zena Moore
Mark English
University of Texas at Austin

I had a wonderful day today. I'm starting to know Arabic. I can barely speak Arabic but that's better than nothing. I can help my brother Aziz when he need help. I like helping my brother cuz he don't understand Arabic like I do. I'm starting to take Arabic home and studie.

(from student journal)

COMPARISONS GOAL

The Comparisons Goal of the new National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996) reflects the widely held belief that students who learn a second language and the cultures in which that language is used benefit cognitively and affectively beyond the immediate curriculum. By going beyond the parameters of their native language and culture, they acquire insights into the very nature of language and cultural systems. As students learn a new language, it is thought that they discover different patterns among language systems and become more aware of how languages operate. Learners soon recognize similarities between their first and second languages, as well as categories and structures in the second language that do not exist, or that differ significantly, in their own. Students also discover that acceptable behaviors or practices in their culture may not be acceptable or may carry different meanings in other cultures. Indeed, one value of language study, particularly if is over an extended period of time, may be the realization that cultures see the world from quite different perspectives.

The Comparison Goal includes two standards.

Standard 4:1

Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own

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This standard focuses on the effect of learning the new lanaguge system on students' ability to develop hypotheses about how lanaguge wortks. It may enable them to go beneath the surface.structures of their own lanaguge to understand more fully how forms carry meaning.

Standard 4.2

Students recognize that cultures use different patterns of interaction and can apply this knowledge to their own

throiughout langauge learning, studnets copntinue to learn about the similaritries and differences with respect to the perspectives, practices and products of the native and second cultures. An awareness of how two cultures have developed patterns in differenbt ways may lead students to suspend judgements of cultural perspectives as simply right or wrong, strange or familiar.

Exploring the Goal in the Context of Teaching All Students

The National Standards throughout he comparison Goal would have students focus on drawing comparisons between L1 and C1 with L2 and C2. the Standards imply that teachers should create opportunities and learning experiences that allow students to make these comparisons throughout their language study. While insights occur over time, teachers can direct students' attention to linguistic elements and cultural factors from the very first lessons. This issue of linguistic and cultural comparisons as a by-product of L2 study is particularly interesting as we face today's challenge of teaching foreign languages to *all* students, not just those who do well in language arts. Exploration of this goal area may help to reach more effectively students who have experienced a lack of interest or failure in learning a foreign language or students who have not been offered the opportunity to study one. helping these students see connections between their own language and culture and the second language and cultures may enable them to be more successful in language study. With this goal as the focus, this project was designed to explore linguistic and cultural comparisons within the context of teaching Arabic to African American students in an inner-city middle school.

Why a case Study of African American Students?

Too often in our country, students in inner city schools who were not considered to be "college bound" or in the "academic track'" were not included in foreign language courses. Given that African American students make up a large percentage of inner-city school populations in many areas in the country, they often become marginalized from foreign language programs. Additionally, research findings, such as that of Ganshow, Sparks and colleagues (1991,1992,1994) that looked at the relationship between L1 and L2 with high-school and college students led them to propose a Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (LCDH) that speculated that foreign language learning problems are linked to native language learning difficulties in mastering the phonological, syntactic and/or semantic "codes" of language. The population for these studies, it must be noted, was not an African American one.

Some researchers (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966) have posited that African Americans, principally those from "culturally disadvantaged" environments, are linguistically deficient. According to the deficit theory (Dummett, 1984), the language spoken by African American students is undeveloped and unstructured. The theory further posits that because of their language deficiency, speakers of Black English suffer a cognitive deficiency that renders them unable to excel in the study of Standard English and other academic subjects (Orr, 1987). In fact, at one time, there were proposals in this country to teach Standard English as a foreign language to speakers of African American English as a means of eradicating the "culturally deprived" stigma associated with the African American student (Bereiter and Englemann, 1966).

During the past twenty years, however, the field of sociolinguistics has made great strides in combating the deficit theory. Research on the phonology and syntax of so-called Black English has convincingly concluded that Black English is a well structured and systematic language (Dillard, 1975). Moreover, the use of Black English does not interfere with a person's ability to excel in any academic endeavor if the proper instruction and learning environment are provided. Sociolinguistics and language educators (DeStefano, 1971; Dummett, 1984; Ford, 1978; Miller, 1953) argued that the attitudes of teachers toward Black English contributed significantly to the academic failure of many African American students who had to deal with instructional materials in Standard English. Miller (1953), for example, in a study on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in historically Black colleges and universities, concluded that many foreign language teachers felt their students suffered from certain communication handicaps that interfered with their ability to learn a foreign language.

The AAE issues being discussed today derive from studies and ideas originating in the 1960s and 1970s which have carried over to the 1980s and 1990s. But there is a

new phenomenon of language vernacular being used by the African American kids who were born in the 1980s which is quite distinct from the traditional perceptions of typical AAE usage among older generations. They are not the normal differences associated with teenagers in their use of street slang in order to speak differently from the older generation. This concept is universal among all teenagers. What is observable is a type of African American English that has been derived from the old standard Black English. The irony of course is that the very groups of adolescents who have been described as linguistically disadvantaged, are creating a new non-standard form of African American street speech which was itself derived from the previous non-standard dialect that thrives within the black street culture. Baugh (1983) describes this so-called non-standard dialect as constantly fluctuating and adjusting to the new terminology flowing in and out of colloquial vogue. So, as teachers we can be sure that there will be manifestations of this dialect in the classroom.

The Project: Background

Case Study Approach

The project was designed as a case study. The case-study approach has had a long history in educational research and has also been used extensively in other areas of research such as clinical psychology and the study of individual differences. In its simplest form, the case study involves an investigator who makes a detailed examination of a single subject or group or phenomenon. Until recently, this approach was rejected by many educational researchers as unscientific, mainly because of its lack of research controls. However, the increased acceptance of qualitative research methods such as educational ethnography and the use of participant observers has revived the case-study approach. Case studies often incorporate a variety of qualitative data-collection methods. Such information sources may include public archival records, private archival records, and direct response data. This study utilizes all of these sources in order to obtain specific information, perceptions, and opinions that are relevant to the study.

The present investigation is particularly suited for what may be viewed as an *observational case study*. As Yin (1984) posits, one of the purposes of a case study is "to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study." (p.11) The focus of this study, together with the setting and subjects involved, naturally lends itself for such a comprehensive investigation and follows what Yin (1984) suggests as four

essential characteristics of a substantive case study. First, this study is *particularistic* in the sense that it will concentrate attention on the way a particular group of people confront a specific problem, taking a holistic view of the situation. Secondly, this study is inherently *descriptive.* Compilation of data from the diaries, questionnaires, observations and interviews will make the end product a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study. Third, this study will be *heuristic* meaning that previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge which may lead to a rethinking of this particular phenomenon involving African American students and foreign language study. Finally, this study is *inductive* in the sense that generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses will emerge from an examination of data which is grounded in the context itself.

Inherent in the qualitative assessment will be an attempt to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of this particular language learning group under study and to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in the students' social structure and process. Because this is primarily a qualitative study, statements of statistical significance will not be given. The data will be presented and analyzed inductively and will be analogous to constructing a picture which takes shape as the parts are collected and examined.

University and Middle School: Professional Development Site

The project was designed to allow the researchers, a university professor and a doctoral student, to get a closer look at African American students in a foreign language classroom. Relatively few studies have focused on the factors affecting the performance and attitudes of African American students in foreign language programs. Over 40 years ago, Miller (1953) pointed out that during a period of 35 years prior to his study, there had been only four scholarly studies on the topic and only two of those dealt with student performance and evaluation. From 1940 to 1991, there few studies, (Nyabongo, 1946; Miller, 1953; Clark & Harty, 1983; Davis & Markham, 1991) focused on some issue related to African American students' perceived needs, performance, and attitudes toward foreign language study. This proposed study is an attempt to build upon the previous research and to offer another dimension of critical inquiry relevant to this important yet often neglected topic.

The college of education, in which the foreign language program is housed,, is actively involved in a Professional Development Site with an inner-city middle school in

the area. The Holmes Group is a national organization made up of university professors, college students and classroom teachers who dedicate time and effort to developing working partnership with schools in the area. The Holmes Group believes that Professional Development Sites (PDS) allow university professors, pre-service and in-service teachers to work together for the improvement of teaching and learning.

University professor and graduate student

The university professor comes from a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural society. She became interested in discovering reasons and explanations for the low enrollments of minorities, in general, and African American in particular, in foreign language education programs. She was specifically puzzled by the virtual absence in enrollment figures of African American student teachers, when national figures suggest ever increasing numbers of minority students in public schools. The student/researcher/teacher in this study is an African American male. He is the sole African American graduate student in the foreign language education program in a large state university. The FL/ESL/EFL program boasts of being one of the strongest in the nation enjoying an average number of 120 applicants from countries all over the world. The startling reality of his single presence in the program engendered interest in the topic of research.

Language Of Instruction

Three main reasons guided the selection of Arabic as the L2. In an earlier study conducted in the same city among African American college students (Moore, 1995), the authors found that several students expressed a preference for studying a language that was "easier to identify with", a language that was spoken by "black people". The students in the case study were aware that there are many Africans who spoke Arabic, such as those in Egypt, Sudan, Chad. One students said that he wanted to learn Arabic so that he could talk "to those Arab dudes" in the school. Their opinions appeared to support the cultural distance theory that learners may be more motivated to learn a foreign language that is linguistically and culturally closer to their own. The second reasons for selecting Arabic was that there was a real-life reason for doing so. There is a locally based active community of Black Muslims who are allied to the National Black Muslim League. Some students wanted to learn to read Arabic so that they could read the Koran and to find out about the teachings of Islam so that they could possibly

become a member of the Black Muslim religious organization. The third reason was more practical. The teacher who taught the students is fluent in Arabic. He is also African American.

The primary instructional material used for this study was an exploratory language unit created by the Middle East Area Studies Center at the University of Texas in consultation with the Texas Education Agency and with assistance from the U.S. Department of Education. The focus of the project was to develop materials for the critical and less commonly taught languages. Targeted toward adolescents, the Arabic teaching material was a unique and challenging course of study meant to build self-esteem, confidence, and motivation for future learning. The specific language unit of Arabic offered students an introduction to the language through the study of Middle East culture, history, and geography. A major goal was to design materials for instruction at an early level, with the hope that it would provide a foundation for continued study. The material is clearly designed to develop all four skills as well as to provide cultural information. For example, the lesson on Greetings and Introductions is presented in the form of cartoons. It figures an African young man greeting a friend on the road. One lesson, focusing on reading road signs, is set in a market in Damascus, another uses authentic material from a restaurant menu (See Appendicies A,B,C,and D).

Exploratory language units at the middle school level vary widely in the amount of time allotted to a particular language study. A successful exploratory language course anticipates this and allows for flexibility of use. Thus, although the materials are sequentially organized in terms of vocabulary and writing system acquisition, they can contain a substantial non-sequential set of activities centered around cultural and regional information as well as language learning techniques. Much of the instruction was augmented by incorporating some of the experiences of the teacher who has taught Arabic at the undergraduate level and who has traveled extensively throughout the Middle East.

Students as collaborators

Based on the standards, therefore, we thought that the students had to be collaborators in this study as well. To obtain glimpses of their feelings, opinions and experiences they received instructions to keep a diary. Defining what is meant by a diary study in second language research is probably best described by Bailey (1991):

> A diary study in second language learning, acquisition, or teaching is an account of a second language experience as recorded in a first-person journal. The diarist may be a language teacher or a language learner--but the central characteristic of the diary studies is that they are introspective: The diarist studies his own teaching or learning. Thus he can report on affective factors, language learning strategies, and his own perceptions--facets of the language learning experience which are normally hidden or largely inaccessible to an external observer. (p.189).

Diary instructions to the students of Arabic were as follows:

> This journal has two purposes. The first is to help you with your language learning. As you write about how you think and feel as a language learner, you will understand yourself and your experience better. The second purpose is to increase the overall knowledge about language learning so that learning can be increased. You will be asked to leave your language learning journal at the end of the semester. However, your journal will be read by myself and researchers interested in language learning. Your identity and the identity of others you may write about will be unknown to anyone except the researchers. You will be given 15 minutes at the end of every class period to write. Please write as if this were your personal journal about your language learning experience.

The teacher also developed guidelines for himself:

> *Self Instructions:* Develop a habit of writing down observations immediately after the end of class. Try to be as specific as possible. Be sure to cover perceptions, strategies, styles, feelings, etc with the intention of formulating a list of factors which learners consider important in their language learning process.

SCHOOL SETTING

Demographics, Teachers and Students

Sanchez Middle School (a psuedonym) is a sixth through eighth grade school and is considered an "inner city school" by its Independent School District. It is located in modest surroundings primarily consisting of minority and low income families. The teacher population at Webb during the time of this study was 51.6% white, 29% Hispanic, and 19.4% African American. The student population was 61.3% Hispanic,

24% African American, 13.4% white, 1.0% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% Native American

Many so called inner city schools suffer from a lack of infrastructure and resources in terms of adequate classrooms, facilities, equipment, etc., when compared to schools in primarily high income neighborhoods. However, Sanchez Middle School does not appear to be lacking in any of those categories. It is a well maintained school with computer and science laboratories, modern industrial technology equipment, bright and lively classrooms, and a variety of extra curricular activities for the students to participate in.

The initial subjects for this study were 10 African American students ranging in age from 13 to 15 and in either the 7th or 8th grade. Two of the subjects were subsequently removed from the school for disciplinary reasons. All the students were from low income families. School records indicated that there were no adult male members in their respective households. There appeared to be a range of cognitive abilities and approaches to learning with some students demonstrating appropriate use of their assumed L1 - Mainstream American English (MAE) in the skills of reading, writing and speaking ability for their grade level while others demonstrated lesser abilities. The verbal behavior among all of the subjects was a mixture of MAE and some of the pronunciation characteristics of African American English (AAE). This was their first exposure to foreign language instruction. They were randomly selected from a pool of initial volunteers of African American students who expressed an interest in learning a foreign language. School records also indicated that most of the subjects appeared to have developed a resistance to educational achievement as evidenced by heavy absenteeism, sporadic suspensions from school and generally marginal performance in other classes.

Their cultural values and norms have been oppositional to school norms which may have led to a conscious avoidance of intellectual engagement, in part because any intellectual activity and achievement is presumably viewed as the domain of whites. As Fordham and Ogbu (1986) posit, these subjects may have internalized facets of the dominant group mythology, notably that African Americans are intellectually less competent than whites, and thus, to achieve academically among students is an instance of "acting white". There was no evidence that the group of students shared this view. Some selections from their journal entries certainly support this. Here are some students' entries which are reprinted *exactly as the students wrote* to better illustrate the students' writing proficiency in their L1.

It should be mentioined that this was the first time that the students were ever given the task of journal writing or composing of any sort in their L1. Their entries demonstrated their L1 writing skills as well as their emotions and thoughts about their learning experiences. They were open and insightful in expressing their emotions and they were hopeful and positive about their abilities. In the 1st excerpt the students expressed the belief that he would move on to study another language now that he recognizes that " he has become very good in learning things."

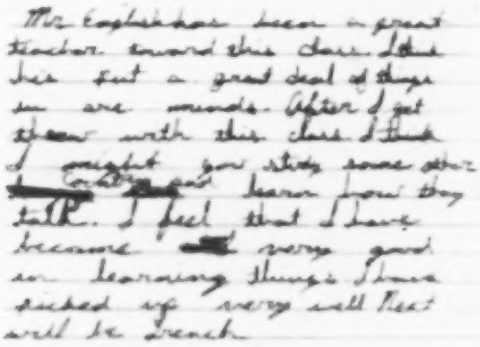

Figure 1. Journal Excerpt

Foreign Language Curriculum

There were two foreign language teachers - one for Spanish and the other for ESL and French. Conversations with the other two language teachers revealed that their respective classes were well structured and involved the use of a variety of language instructional material that included film, video, newspapers, magazines, music and other realia. Although the two teaching styles were relatively different, their commonality of style reflected active and direct involvement in the classroom similar to a director of a stage play with students as actors. They also saw themselves as providing a safe environment in which students could learn and grow. The counselling/parenting analogy.

Testing of student knowledge consisted of vocabulary and grammar exercises, content questions, and multiple choice questions. Both considered appropriate student behavior as: willingness to try a new language, positive and cheerful attitude, attentiveness, and willing to participate. Their views of inappropriate behavior consisted of talking, out of seat, disrespectful toward teachers/others, unwillingness to try a new language and being off-task.

These teachers did not feel that there was a cultural gap between themselves and the minority students in their class. They handled difficult students (in terms of

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performance and behavior) by insisting that the students follow classroom procedures, scheduling extra time for remedial work, and adjusting their teaching style to learning and behavioral differences.

This was the first time that one of the less commonly taught languages was being presented at Sanchez Middle school. Although the students were not utilizing a specific text book for this project, there were a number of worksheets and general handouts which covered all of the areas in a foreign language curriculum of instruction. Though purposefully generic in nature, pictures and other drawings from the exploratory teaching materials still reflected a bias against minorities in general and African Americans in particular. The way in which African Americans have been portrayed in textbooks and other illustrative material has been an issue for many years. Even with this exploratory language unit, that bias still persisted. While conducting a dialogue exercise with the students, one of them remarked, "How come there are no black people in these pictures?" (There were no real pictures, just illustrative drawings of adolescents talking). Many studies have cited the fact that illustrations of any form can have a lasting impact on an individual. This is particularly true when these visual images carry nonverbal messages about race, even if such messages were not intended by the author (Boben, 1985; IABC, 1982; TEA, 1979). Because the nature of illustrations and pictures can be instrumental in transmitting ideas and cultural values, this is still a crucial issue in the education of children, regardless of ethnic background. This issue needs to be explored further.

Parents and community

There is little to no involvement in the life of the school community by the parents of the students in this project. This may largely be a function of the students in this study coming from low income single parent households. The teacher/researcher had an opportunity to talk to some of the parents of the students. They were all working mothers who expressed a sincere interest in their child's education and progress but rarely interacted with teachers or school administrators.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT AND RESULTS

The university professor held preliminary discussions with the Principal of the school about the possibility of conducting the study. The graduate student and the professor then had a second meeting with the principal to discuss in greater detail what

the study entailed. The principal is an alumna and part-time faculty of the university and is very interested in the success of the Holmes Professional Site. She offered full cooperation and showed genuine pleasure at the possibility of augmenting the foreign language curriculum and increasing the number of electives offered to students.

Projects Phases and time frames

The project was planned to last two semesters, (a six month period) sufficient time to allow for the students to learn some basic language skills and to be evaluated. Webb Middle school was an all year school and this facilitated structuring the two semesters to run without interruption of a long vacation period.

Exploratory language courses at the middle school level vary widely in the amount of time allotted to a particular language study. A successful exploratory language course anticipates this and allows for flexibility of use. Thus, although the materials were sequentially organized in terms of vocabulary and writing system acquisition, they contained a substantial non-sequential set of activities centered around cultural and regional information as well as language learning techniques. Instruction took place over a six month period, the equivalent of one full semester. Using the exploratory language unit and other language material, the teacher taught Arabic to the subjects for one semester. Class met three times per week; one day for a 45 minute period and the other two days for two hours each. The 45 minute period class was used primarily for review and more casual classroom interaction. The other two periods focused on specific language learning skills.

Language learning material was presented in order to incorporate the oral, aural, and visual skills into productive output. Some of the more specific language skills being introduced were the following:

- discriminating and articulating Arabic sounds in isolated words
- discriminating and articulating sounds in connected speech (e.g., assimilation)
- recognizing and manipulating Arabic script
- recognizing the stem and root of an unfamiliar lexical item
- understanding and producing information orally and in writing at the sentence level
- understanding and expressing implicit meaning based on context
- understanding and expressing conceptual meanings such as relational concepts, time, quantity, frequency, etc.

Mastery of the skills required a great deal more than just functional memorization. It required a shift to a higher level of comprehension and manipulation of basic language skills. Introduction of a new level of skills (Intermediate level) with a focus on a higher level of proficiency, proved to be quite a leap in cognitive ability for most, if not all of the students. According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines (1989), the intermediate level is characterized by an "ability to understand main ideas and some facts from interactive exchanges and simple connected aural or written texts."

Student and Teacher Comments and Reactions

The students maintained a diary and to write down their thoughts, ideas, and impressions as they go through the language learning process. In addition, two video taped sessions, one taken at the early stages of the project and the other taken at the final stages provided much information about the students' classroom behavior, their learning styles, their language, and their opinions. Clips from the video tapes along with excerpts from their journals provide much of the students' comments which we report here.

On Learning Arabic

An initial question and answer period about the learning of foreign languages in general and about learning Arabic in particular, revealed that most students had a negative attitude toward Arabs as a group. Most seemed uninterested in learning a new language, especially Arabic. One student asked, "Do they speak Arabic in Africa?" while another student commented, "I don't want to learn that Arabic stuff, why should I since I can't use it anywhere?" The teacher explained to them the possible advantages of learning a foreign language and Arabic in particular for future schooling and professions but most seemed unimpressed with those explanations. However, most of the students expressed interest in knowing more about the cultural aspects. The interest and enthusiasm generated from the cultural sessions were captured on videotape. In one lesson each student, dressed in a different Arabic outfit, had to make an oral presentation on Arabic ways of dressing. The video tapes revealed that the students had acquired a lot of information. For example, one student demonstrated how the *Kaffiah* was worn and the different styles used with it. He knew why it was worn, (to

protect the wearer from the sand); the material of which it was made (tightly woven cotton cloth) and the name of the black cord (*aggaal)* that held it in place. Similar scenarios that made the cultural practices come alive seemed to motivate and fascinate the students and led to discussions of various countries, dress, costumes, food, geography, etc.. of the Arab world. During his presentation, one student said:

> Now I understand why dey wear all dese clothes and why dey different from American clothes. Before I t'ought that dey were just weird!

Comments like these showed a gradual awareness of cultural differences and the reasons for the differences.

During the introduction of the Arabic alphabet, phonology, and writing and recognition of letters, most students were eager to learn how to write and went ahead of the instruction when completing the writing worksheet tasks. Some were hesitant to get up in front of the class and recite the phonetic sounds of the alphabet but they all pronounced most of the new letters with minor mistakes. One student said that "this stuff was too easy..." and he was bored and restless. He could not stay seated for more than a few minutes at a time. The teacher told him it would become more challenging as the lessons progressed. Again, the video-taped interviews gave them the opportunity to talk about their Arabic skills. All the students said that liked writing in Arabic, and they liked speaking the language. They all said that learning to write Arabic helped them become more aware of writing in their own language. One student wrote:

> In Arabic, you have to take your time and pay attention to all the lil tings. I like dat, becuz I feel good when I get it right.

After several weeks, most of the students had changed their minds about learning a foreign language. The said that they liked the class because it was fun and they had tangible proof that they were learning. They were quite amused at my lack of knowledge of the current street slang and so I began my own education as I learned the current slang teenagers use today. By this time, too, the students had got used to their Arabic names, which they seemed to like, since the names carried their own meaning. They seemed flattered by names like Assad, which means "the lion", and Mubarak, which means "the generous one". The 5th exerpt captures the importance of personalizing instruction whereas the 3rd and 4th reveal the importance of having an appreciative warm teacher.

The class was a little hard because of the lettering and the writing. The lesson was a fun and interesting but I am going to need practice. I am glad am taking this class it lets you express your feeling. The class is one of my best classes. The letters are a little bit hard but I can manage it.

I like class today. It was fun I was not at all scared, the class is well behaved.

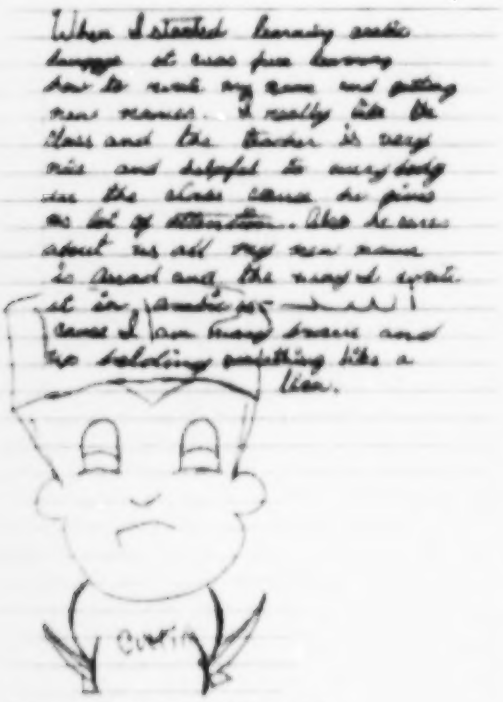

Figure 2. Journal Excerpt

Learning styles

Most students appeared to be visual learners with a strong desire to touch, feel, act out or improvise on new material. Some students were more verbal than others but most showed an interest in verbalizing variations of new words and sounds to see how they fit into their very stylized African American English vernacular with its unique rhythm and harmony. Some students were trying to use their initial knowledge of Arabic sounds to compose "rap" songs in order to aid in memorizing the sounds.

After the fifth session, (approximately two weeks), most of the students had marginally mastered the sounds of the Arabic Alphabet. A couple of them still had

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problems with memorization and concentration and needed some assistance when reciting the alphabet, but they all learned to write their assigned Arabic name and to formulate simple sentences in Arabic.

All students appeared to be at ease in the class and learning now took place within the framework of a highly affective domain. The students were very people oriented and sensitive to the nuances of body language, facial expressions, and the use of nonverbal cues. Raising my voice to emphasize a point in class was only temporarily effective but when they worked together to solve a problem or I looked at them in a certain way (stern to get them to behave in class or more congenial when they performed a certain task correctly) that appeared to have a more lasting effect. I begun to see a connection or bonding between the students and myself. They began joking around me and with each other in friendly fashion. A feeling of social solidarity in the classroom was growing.

Although I was still an authority figure, my teaching style began to reflect a non-authoritative attitude. For example, I started to allow the students to design their own learning material. During a role play scenario, the students came up with their own settings for meeting someone and introducing themselves and a friend. With a mixture of African American street slang and basic Arabic greetings, the students enjoyed the exercise and hopefully retained some of the vocabulary from that experience. One student captured this feeling of accomplishment in the 7th excerpt. Notice that, although the student's L1 writing in the 7th excerpt contained spelling mistakes which may have been due to carelessness, he was scoring excellent grades for Arabic. The same student made entry in the 9th excerpt. The entry indicates a L1 writing skill at novice level. It is an example of a Grade 2 or 3 writing. This student was 13 years old. His ability to write in Arabic and to score 100% in every test were evidences of his academic ability and seemed to suggest that with more effective teaching in the L1 this student can perform better.

I had a test and mad good grade for the six week I made a 100% average.

Today is a good day learning to talk at steps now and I'm getting to memorize things and what mean so can help other people such as (illegible) I'm talking about the weather.

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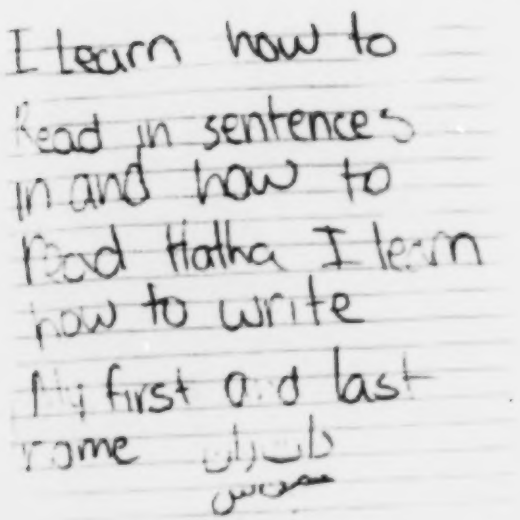

(Hatha=this/that in Arabic)

Figure 3. Journal Excerpts

Classroom setting

After the first month of instruction, the social dimension of the classroom appeared to take a new turn. The students felt more comfortable around me and I too began to feel the same around them. The result was an environment in which I came to appreciate certain modal cognitive styles and behavioral characteristics. For example, all of the students had short attention spans and were unable to persist toward the completion of a task without a great deal of assistance. There was a great need for physical contact between themselves and they thrived on competition. In short, the setting evolved to a physical and visual style of learning. The classroom was rarely quiet, a fact that was very discommoding, since classrooms are expected to be like quiet cemeteries. Even when asked to perform individual focused tasks, there was constant bantering and joking and drawing while they were attempting to accomplish the task. Most of the students were very bright and liked the challenge of learning a new and difficult language but they were easily bored with the drills, which the material designers believed to be important for language foundation building.

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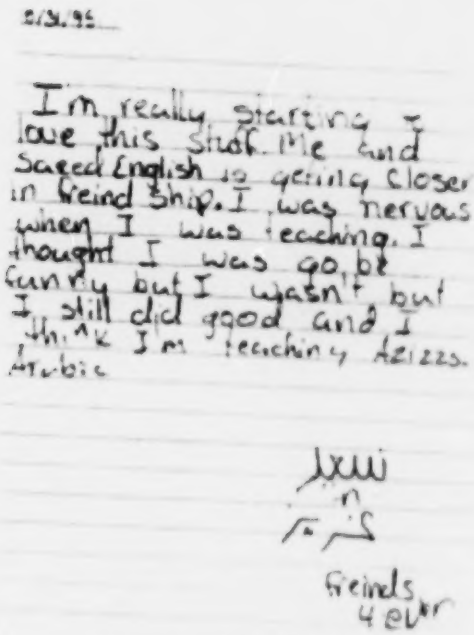

Figure 4. Journal Excerpt

L1 and L2 transfer

Although some of the students demonstrated weaknesses in their L1 reading, (pronunciation), and writing skills, (spelling, and cursive writing), those problems were not transferred to the L2 when more vocabulary and other grammar functions were introduced. In fact, the opposite was true. It seemed that the more the students became familiar with the cursive writing style in Arabic script, the better they became at it. This was particularly revealing for one of the students who could not write cursive in his L1 yet became quite proficient in writing in Arabic script as the semester progressed. Further, there were no noticeable reading errors in the L2 in terms of the pronunciation of recognizable letter combinations. Mastering these skills was quite a remarkable achievement given the difficulty most Westerners have in fully incorporating the requisite reversal of cognitive strategies to read and write from right to left.

In order to make the introduction of new vocabulary words more relevant, I asked the students to tell me some of their favorite "slang" words that African American adolescents use these days and what their translation was for those not socialized in that vernacular. For example, "kitch" meant a girl, "loc" (pronounced "loke") meant a friend (when greeting) e.g., "What's up loc?" and "sax" meant someone's personal business. One student wrote in his journal:

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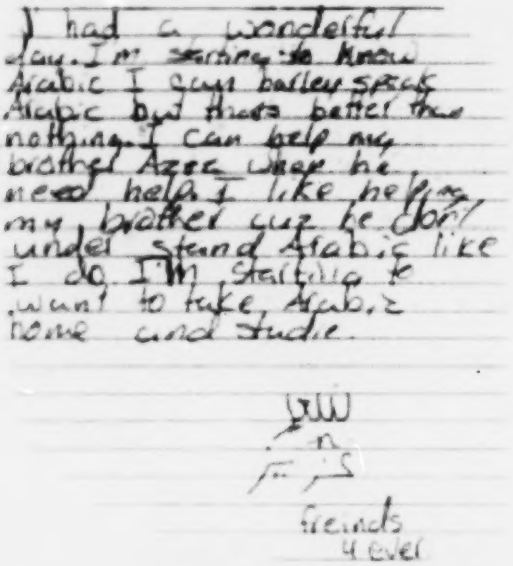
So far we have taught Mr. M. 5 slang words. These are Kitch,Cuz,Loc,Saks and tight. Also we learned how to say the same owrds in Arabic.


I had a wonderful day. I'm starting to know Arabic I guys barley speak Arabic but thats better than nothing. I can help my brother Azee when he need help I like help my brother cuz he don't under stand Arabic like I do. I'm starting to want to take Arab. 2 home and study.

friends 4 ever

Figure 5. Journal Excerpt

These and other slang words were put on the chalk board. I first constructed a transliteration of the English words using Arabic letters and then I translated the words into Arabic. After the new Arabic words were introduced to them, I asked them to use the Arabic instead of their usual slang equivalent from now on inside the classroom and outside if possible. The students enjoyed this new way of communicating by using their L1 words of slang in combination with new "cool foreign sounding" words. They liked to impress their other friends and teachers by initiating conversations among themselves that no one else could understand. This ability to combine L1 and L2 expressions in real world settings was instrumental in giving the students more confidence in their ability to learn a different language. I hoped this would be one way of aiding the memory of some basic vocabulary words or expressions in Arabic that they used on a daily basis among themselves.

One lesson called for the introduction of vocabulary used when ordering food and going to a restaurant. I told them that if they could verbalize in Arabic what they wanted from Mc Donald's and also write it down correctly, then if I could comprehend what they had said and what they had written down, I would go to Mc Donald's and buy what they had ordered. To assist them, I had a placemat from a Mc Donald's in the Middle East which had all of the items written in Arabic along with colorful pictures. Surprisingly, they wrote down their respective orders better than they could articulate what they

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wanted. Although it really wasn't fair because they had not been introduced to some of the verbal constructions to ask for something. However, I wanted them to interpolate and be creative with their vocabulary. I wrote down their respective orders while at the same time attempting to teach them some new expressions and vocabulary. Needless to say, they had a great time with this little exercise. The next class meting I showed up with their orders and we had a "Mc Donald's" afternoon of eating and learning while we ate.

This exercise was revealing in terms of how the students reflected on their L1 (SAE) phonological cues. For example in order to help them better comprehend the sounds of Arabic letters, they were told to write the English words in Arabic script. Thus, instead of trying to memorize for example, the Arabic word for milk *(haleeb)* and its corresponding Arabic script, they were practicing Arabic script on known L1 vocabulary. Later when sounds of Arabic words were introduced, the students had a better comprehension of the L2 phonological cues because of earlier practice on L1 phonological cues.

Students as teachers

in one class period, I asked Assad and Saeed to teach certain portions of the class. They both seemed willing and eager to do so. Assad, was a talented artist, and the class was challenging for him. He introduced the class to new vocabulary items. I didn't tell him how to approach his teaching the class but I wanted him to ensure that he was satisfied that everyone could understand the definitions and that everyone could pronounce the words correctly. I was totally impressed with the way he conducted the class. He wrote down each new word in their morphological components and explained how each word should be pronounced and then called on individual students to pronounce and then define what the new word meant. The change in the students' attitude as witnessed in the video-taping of this lesson was remarkable. Throughout this approximately 30 minutes of instruction, all of the students were very quiet and attentive, although there was the usual casual bantering. They were respectful of Assad and gave him no problems. The incident gave cause for reflection on the part of the university professor and on my part. It showed that the students knew how to comport themselves in the classroom. Why, then, did they give other teachers problems? There was no doubt that what teachers considered "discipline problems" may be more accurately interpreted as acts of defiance and resistance.

I later asked Saeed to introduce some new expressions that involved the use of the interrogative and of verbal expressions using the newly introduced verb "to like". Saeed took his new responsibility seriously and was more strict with the students than Assad in terms of attention to detail of pronunciation. This caused some turmoil in the class, primarily because some of the students did not think that Saeed knew the material better than they and were therefore peeved that he should extract such exactitude from them. Overall, however, the students probably had more fun and presumably learned more from their peers than from me, which raises the broader issue of how interactive pedagogy and student-centered classrooms can possibly bring about effective language learning at the middle school level.

Application of Learned Material (or Can they use the language in real situations?)

For one lesson, I took the students on a field trip to an Arabic restaurant. The purpose was to introduce them to Arabic food and to augment previous instruction on the eating habits of people from the Middle East. I ordered a sampler of appetizers to go along with their selected entree. They had a brief introduction of the different types of Arabic food and how it is prepared etc. My professor and one of the assistant principals also joined us. Discussion at the table was lively with a variety of questions about how certain foods tasted etc. They were all curious and respectfully ate some of the more exotic appetizers. For the most part, they all ordered the Kabobs which was essentially grilled chicken or beef with a plate of Saffron rice. The waitress was thoroughly impressed when they all introduced themselves in Arabic! In fact, I was pleasantly surprised, (and so was the Vice-Principal who knew them only in the roles of underachievers and troublemakers) , at the ease and fluency with which they all spoke. I was even more impressed when they tried to elevate the conversation by asking the waitress what her name was in Arabic. Not one mistake or hesitancy by anyone during this brief exchange! I now had tangible evidence that not only were they definitely learning something from the instruction but that they were willing and able to demonstrate their new knowledge outside of classroom settings and in conjunction with casual L1 usage.

Findings: Reflections on Comparisons Goal

To say that the project was a tremendous success is an understatement. It may be more productive and helpful, especially to foreign language teachers of African American students who may be interested in similar projects to present a summary of what worked.

An ethnographic case study

An ethnographic approach, as used in the study, provided us with much data. We were able to get an in-depth look at learning styles and teaching strategies. We followed the growth and progress of the students simply by being there week after week. We were able to modify what did not work and improve or repeat what did work. Most of all we had evidenced that the group of students, badly labeled as they were, were capable of learning and functioning in Arabic. We witnessed their performance in and out of the classroom.

Student and teacher as collaborators

We included the students as collaborative partners in the teaching and learning process. They were data providers and data collectors. Their voices were part of the database. Only from them could we get accurate pictures of their world. The use of the journals provided the researcher with an outlet for capturing his own learning experiences as well as documenting the class events and feelings of the students. It was also a means of accessing the students' insights targeted in the Comparisons Goal of the National Standards.

The video-taped recordings

Especially useful was the use of the video recorder. An hour long video-taping of the students captured personal interviews in which they expressed their feelings and experiences as students in that particular school setting. Through the recordings we saw the actual class activities, the visuals in the classroom, and the students' behavior. The video taped sessions of the two students teaching the class allowed us glimpses of a type of peer interaction behavior that we had not seen in any other setting.

L1-L2 Comparsions: facilitating FL Learning

While the relatively short duration of this project limited the insights of a comparative nature envisioned in the Standards, it was eviudent that interactions between L2/L1, and C2/C1, were occurring. One of the more revealing findings from this project was how certain grammatical constructions of the students L1 (AAE) actually helped to facilitate the understanding of new constructions while the students were learning Arabic (L2). Therefore, we suggest that discussions on Arabic, African American English, and Standard English phonology and syntax can provide the type of analysis which may help foreign language teachers to better understand the important linkages that exist for comparing and contrasting L1 and L2 constructions. This understanding should facilitate instructional approaches.

One of the major teaching points in learning grammatical structures in Arabic is that forms of the verb "to be" do not exist. Although generally a difficult concept to grasp for students who have been socialized into structures of Standard English, the students in this project who exhibited some features of AAE vernacular, readily understood this concept. This may be explained by the fact that one of the major syntactic features in AAE is the existence of the zero copula: "I think they in the kitchen," "the principal in his office now," "they walking to school," etc. These sentence structures are patterned similarly in Arabic except the verb comes before the subject. When this concept was introduced, the students may have readily grasped the L2 constructions after consciously or unconsciously recalling their use of some L1 (AAE) syntactic features.

This finding challenges commonly held beliefs that AAE may be an inhibitive factor in learning a foreign language. This study challenges the work done by Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) for its genuine lack of appreciation for the intricate structural components of nonstandard vernaculars such as AAE, which, according to evidence from this study, have features that can readily facilitate and even enhance the language learning experience of speakers of those vernaculars.

A Comparison with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

Mid-way through the semester (approximately three months) the students demonstrated selective performance at the Novice-High level in the primary skills of speaking, reading, writing, and listening. According to the ACTFL Arabic Proficiency Guidelines (1989), this equates to the following:

Speaking: Able to satisfy partially the requirements of very basic communicative exchanges. Partial ability to make short statements using simple formulaic phrases and ask a few simple questions. Vocabulary focuses on basic objects and activities. Pronunciation will often be faulty, and delivery will still be strongly influenced by first language.

Listening: Comprehends a number of memorized utterances in areas of immediate need, involving situations where context is an aid to understanding. May require repetition, rephrasing and /or a slowed rate of speech for comprehension.

Reading: Can identify a number of set expressions and memorized material in areas of immediate need. Can recognize all Arabic letters as they occur in any position in a word, including *hamza* and *alif maqsuura*. Where vocabulary has been mastered, can read for instructional and directional purposes, standardized messages, phrases or expressions, such as some items on menus.

Writing: Can reproduce all the symbols of the alphabet in a form recognizable to a native-speaker and write frequently used memorized material such as their own name. Can write some memorized short sentences. Ability to write rudimentary personal communication is partial. Sound to symbol correspondence is developing, but reproduction in written form is still erratic.

The availability of the ACTFL rating scale provided us with an objective measure. We were able to evaluate the students' performance, objectively, using a national scale, and we could do that across all skills.

Addressing the Comparisons Goal

In an explanation of how he teaches African American students to appreciate languages and one's own language and culture, James J. Davis, an African American professor at Howard University, states simply that "we tend to look at culture in the foreign language context in terms of the big icons of civilization such as the Eiffel tower--culture with a big 'C.' But what we foreign language teachers need to do is teach culture with little 'c' by taking students inside the map to the people who inhabit other places, to learn what makes them tick, how they behave."

Whether it is used in the classroom or not, the study of the use of AAE as a students L1 when compared to other languages can be an instrument for students to understand how certain languages and vernaculars have shaped both low and high cultures of the African diaspora, as in the creole dialects of the Caribbean and Louisiana. For example, in dealing with African American students, it can be posited that any cultural matrix of the African diaspora is not uniquely "black" or African but an amalgamation of diverse cultural and linguistic influences. Exposing African American students to this type of analysis supports the contention that through language and literature, links can be formed with other people that transcend national definitions. Language crosses political, cultural, intellectual, and ideological boundaries and can introduce all students to new ways of looking at the world by connecting people of all colors across the globe. Interest in foreign languages by African American students can be enhanced when classes show the inter-connectedness of one's own language and culture and that these students belong to a world that reaches beyond the borders of the United States.

Personal voice of the teacher

What did I learn about myself as a teacher/researcher?

One aspect of this experience in which I was particularly pleased as a teacher/researcher was the demonstrated ability of these students to ignore what others (teachers) have said about what they could not do in terms of learning and achievement. Instead, these students focused on what they could do. In order to contribute to this atmosphere of positive development, I wanted to create an environment in which the students could, in a very real sense, *construct* knowledge-- in contrast to a situation in which the learner would be given that knowledge by someone else (parents or teachers for example). Bruner (1990) calls this teaching approach *Discovery Learning* where learning takes place when students are not presented with subject matter in its final form but rather are required to organize it themselves. This approach requires learners to discover for themselves relationships that exist among items of information. The most important and most obvious characteristic of a discovery approach to teaching is that it requires far less teacher involvement and direction than most other methods. However, this method does not imply that the teacher ceases to give any guidance once the initial problem has been presented. In fact, this approach takes far more preparation of teachers (both professional preparation and individual

preparation for each lesson) than 'regular' pedagogies. The advantages of a discovery approach are that such learning facilitates transfer and retention, increases problem solving ability, and increases motivation.

For example, when I introduced English words of Arabic origin, it was necessary for the students to understand the concept of the definite article *"al" (the)* in many Arabic words and that this definite article was still present in many English words. When I introduced words such as *algebra (al-jabr, "the reduction")* and *almanac (al-manakh, "the climate")*, it was much easier for students to arrive at a concept that related certain vocabulary words once it had been discovered that they were all derived from words with the *"al"* as the definite article. They learned that alphabet, and alfafa, alcohol, alkali wre words derived from Arabic. This knowledge, in turn, permitted the students to make inferences about other specific words which allowed them to go beyond the information given. The capabilities of these students, exemplified through discovery learning and through other demonstrated abilities, suggest that they were not only willing to learn but also capable of mastering intellectual challenges beyond what may have been expected of them.

There have been few programs designed specifically for African American students enrolled in foreign language study that relate their unique cultural experiences to the study of foreign languages. In the past, African American student experiences in the classroom have often been viewed negatively by some educators. Deviations from the norm were seen as a problem where students had to be "corrected." This examination may help to reveal, in part, that the problem may not be with students but instead may be with the attitudes and perceptions of teachers. Through this experience, I have learned to be more receptive to new ideas in pedagogy which may be viewed as radical or outside the status quo. I also hope that I may have contributed in some measure to questioning notions of what constitutes academic success. This may be the first step in recognizing that learning a foreign language, like any other academic endeavor, is well within the intellectual capabilities of many African American students.

What did I learn about myself as an innovator?

In order to accommodate the synergistic learning styles of these students, my teaching reflected a combination of several influences which I adapted to my particular situation. Most notably were the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) and what some literature suggests as Discovery Learning or the Constructivist Approach to teaching based on a theory of cognitive learning (Bruner, Goodnow, & Austin, 1956;

Bruner, 1973). Over the years, language teachers have intuitively recognized the value of associating language with physical activity and that there was a need to create an environment that was a stress-free as possible, where learners would not feel overly self-conscious and defensive. I tried to incorporate this knowledge into the way I presented material and the way I interacted with the students.

I structured the classroom as a free flowing environment where students did not have assigned seats and where they can sit with whom and where they want. Material was presented in a cooperative fashion in terms of what particular subjects the students feel are relevant to them. Instead of the use of textbooks, handouts, and lectures, teaching is more interpersonally-oriented with frequent interruptions for anecdotes from both student and teacher. The students preferred, and seemed to benefit from, peer-oriented seating, review sessions, study questions, and student presentations. Because these students were very physically oriented and extroverted they related physically to their cognitive work through role plays, jokes, and games. They appeared to learn or absorb the material better when they related physically to their peers in the classroom. The difference in orientation might create problems for the teacher used to traditional methods of instruction but not unsolvable ones if teachers are willing to make adjustments.

In a sense I allowed the classroom to become a stage where interaction with others was important. From the perspective of teaching a foreign language, this proved to be quite effective in introducing certain phrases and grammatical structures in real situations where the students could physically act out or relate to. Similar settings, or simulated settings like hanging out in a mall or on the basketball court or at the movies can provide settings that may make learning more successful and purposeful. Such real or simulated settings provide synergists, who often come from limited experiential backgrounds, a means of expanding their perception of the world and of acquiring information.

I emphasized cooperative learning. Slavin (1983) and Johnson and Johnson (1985) demonstrated rather clearly that the use of cooperative learning can result in improved achievement. This also ties in with the fact that the social structure of a classroom sets the stage for a learner's self- concept. The Quiz results showed that the more the students interacted with each other the easier they retained information and the more productive they became. Some of the students appeared to be challenged by those who were doing better and tried to emulate them. The smarter ones in turn were always trying to help the others with their in-class work. The key here is that the

students were never alone during the learning process and there was a constant sharing of information and explanation.

I find that the use of a multisensory approach to teaching new material facilitates the learning process. Instead of the traditional approach to teaching, I chose to show the relationship between concepts, use active, interactive discussion, bring concrete objects to demonstrate the relationship of the concepts to the world and environment through the use of art forms, pictures, and drama. For example, in teaching new vocabulary items, I took the class on a field trip to real world places such as a restaurant and other places in the community so they could actually see certain objects that they could not otherwise visualize or touch or feel. This change of environment coupled with the real world objects greatly enhanced the ability to associate an object with a word and its corresponding pronunciation and spelling. This was particularly acute because of the different alphabet, sounds, and formation of the different letters. Unfortunately, many teachers equate the need for concrete, factual, motor manipulatives with low intelligence rather than as a perceptual preference.

I tried to tailor my presentation of new material with structures that complement the cognitive learning style of the students. Often, the students preferred to be told how to do a problem rather than discern the way of approaching the solution. Unfortunately, this often led me to focus purely on the knowledge level rather than moving the student through the application, synthesis, and evaluation stages. This was obviously a limitation in the classroom and I tried to rectify it by trying to have a blend of both the analytic as well as the synergetic approach to learning. As mentioned earlier, my style was more a hybrid of both the Natural Approach and the Discovery Learning Approach. Insights and intuitions from these approaches to teaching not only accommodated the learning styles of these students but it may also have been instrumental in analyzing the effect of the language learning experience on the students' use of Standard English or perhaps more importantly, the effect on the use of their L1--African American English.

<u>What Changes will I make in my own practice as a result of this project?</u>

I will try to incorporate a more cooperative, interpersonally-oriented type of instruction that involves student presentations and more interactive discussions and multisensory presentations. For example, incorporating blocks of instruction that includes a hands-on demonstration of the use and function of cultural artifacts. For this project, the students had the opportunity to dress up like an Arab person and became

familiar with the various types of clothing worn. They also had the opportunity to burn some Frank Incense in the classroom to gain an appreciation for what Arabs value as pleasant smelling. They were also introduced to "Misbaha" or "worry beads" and their function in Islam. These vignettes illustrated that the students were interested in and seemed to enjoy the look and feel of real objects from the Arab world. I must continue to incorporate more manipulatives in the classroom to augment instruction.

There are other practical steps that I can take as a teacher to help students bridge the comparisons of other languages and cultures with the students' own language and culture. One of these steps would be to create a culturally compatible classroom which addresses the perceptual, motivation, and behavioral styles of students from different backgrounds. Through various techniques such as developing activities and a classroom environment that is moderately structured, frequently praise acts of learning rather than negatively commenting on behavior, and use small groups and cooperative learning, I can be sensitive to the social and emotional factors in the classroom and use them as positive influences on learning.

Dissemination of Project Results

All foreign language educators should be gathering information from studies such as this one. As the challenge to teach all students a language is taken up, teachers must learn the ingredients of success. Specifically, those educators in middle schools and inner-city schools where ethnic diversity is great must create programs that include all young people in learning other languages as a means of learning more about their own language and culture. It is clear from this study that the group of young Black male students can be motivated to learn and can accomplish a lot. Teachers should be trained in diverse methods of being effective teachers. The classroom setting and classroom interaction that played an important part of putting the students at ease are generally at variance with the average classroom setting. The study indicated that the students must be given opportunities to develop friendship and support for each other.

Foreign language teachers and educators must become familiar with cultural differences in learning. The study showed how exposure to the cultural instruction about attire, food, names and religious behavior made language learning more meaningful to the students. Students in the study took pride in teaching their classmates. The interactive teaching/learning approaches used with the students were effective. Foreign lanaguge teachers need to build more interactive activities into language learning.

Foregin language teachers and educators interested in investigating African American presence in foreign language instruction can gain from this study. We need to develop more studies that are guided by the naturalistic inquiry mode. Long periods of time spent with studnts as they perform in the classroom can reap tremendous insights into their learning styles and abilities. The students in this study did not demonstrate hostility and resistance to learning, as is so often cited in the literature. Rather they showed eagerness and pleasure in learning although they admitted that it was not easy.

The myriad social, political, and economic, issues which surround the unique niche that many African American students occupy in our schools is beyond the scope of this study. However, findings from this examination may contribute to the further study of the salient issues related to the education of these students within a specific context of learning. In the past, African American student experiences in the classroom have often been viewed as a "problem" with fervent discussions about what this problem entailed and what to do with it. This study contends that the problem may not be with the student but instead may be with teacher attitudes and perceptions. We must relinquish notions of what constitutes academic success and recognize that learning a foreign language, like any other academic endeavor is well within the intellectual capabilities of many African American students.

In recent years, researchers have posited several factors as major contributors to successful L2 learning: intelligence, language-learning aptitude, teaching methodologies utilized, age, motivation, and psychological and social distance factors which may be related to both the target language speaking community and the actual learning environment. The influence of these factors on successful language learning is universal for all students and does not necessarily affect African American students any differently. Consideration of these factors suggests that communicative competence, where language is used in pragmatically appropriate ways to fulfill social functions, implies the need for language learners to perceive and understand more than the structural factors or linguistic components of a language.

Teaching All Students

This study was fundamentally an endeavor to determine the effect of culturally relevant teaching and other social and cultural factors which can have a positive influence on learning among African American adolescents. Some of these factors included those which the literature has discussed as important to language learning and those derived from actual classroom observations. The degree to which these factors

compare with Schumann's taxonomy of social, affective, personality, and cognitive factors may contribute to a better understanding of the effect of foreign language learning situations on African American students. Additionally, sociolinguistic factors such as the influence of cultural values and norms on language learning may indicate the value of other factors which also may be viewed as valid predictors of how certain students may approach language learning situations. Results from this study may have substantive pedagogical implications on the learning of a second language-not only for African Americans but also for other minority students. Among the recommendations are:

1. Foreign language coordinators must be encouraged to design special workshops for teachers of minority students. Workshops of this nature have traditionally catered for Language Arts teachers at the K-5 levels and foreign language teachers have not profitted from suchexposure.
2. Foreign language teachers must expand their training to include linguistic and sociolinguistic courses that deal with ethnic groups in the USA.
3. Foreign language teachers in inner-city schools must receive special training in teaching non-standard English speakers
4. The foreign language teaching profession should focus more attention to issues of instruction of middle-school students.
5. The foreign language teaching profession must begin looking at preparing its teachers to teach in truly diverse school settings.
6. There is need for undertake more research on L1 and L2 interaction
7. The Northeast Conference may consider having its next conference on topics dealing with teaching and learning foreign languages in diverse classrooms.

NOTES

A thorough evaluation of phonological structures in African American English according to current linguistic theory is beyond the scope of this study. Such an undertaking can occur only after more basic syntactic and morphological problems have been solved. Instead, it may be more relevant to present several phonological features demonstrated by the subjects which are also often noted among African American non-standard speaking populations and to contrast those features with a brief analysis of Arabic and Standard English phonology. It goes without saying that these students clearly are not representative of the non-standard speaking populations and that there is a great deal of phonological variation within

those populations. Further, these generalizations are perhaps not exclusively valid for any one speaker. We will discuss eight features.

(i) Vowels in General

The low front vowel /a/ (as in *father* in most American white dialects) is present in most versions of African American English. It also occurs in Southern white dialects, and may have spread to them from earlier forms of African American English. This vowel is between the /a/ of *hot* and the /ae/ of *cat*; even when lengthened, it sounds like the vowel of *cat* or *cap* to many speakers of Standard English. A common expression that the students used in class was "Yo, what's up dawg?" It is this *dawg* expression that most closely resembles this vowel in their vernacular. In the early 1970s it was not uncommon to here of unexpected discoveries of "new homophone pairs" such as *island* and *Allen* in the so called Negro Non-Standard. Dillard (1972) asserts that although the homophone set of African American English is different from that of Standard English, these two would not be examples; /a l n/ contrasts with /ael n/, but some speakers of Standard English can't hear the difference. The lengthened /a / of *island* in African American English is, of course, /ay/ ("long *i*") in Standard English.

This "replacement" by African American English is shared with many Southern white dialects and in fact was used by some of the white native Texans teachers at the middle school where the study was conducted Any theory of the direction of influence would require long and careful consideration. In some places where there is a large African American middle class such as Washington, D.C., there may be less tendency to this phonological development before voiceless consonants /bdg/; that is, the /a / sound will occur in *ride* but the /ay/ sound will occur in *write*. The more extreme forms of African American English have the "substitution" everywhere. African American English vowels, like Southern white dialects, have a marked tendency to lengthen: /pl g/ for /plg/ *pig*. Instances of students using this vowel lengthening is quite common and is evidenced by such phrases as *"I'm tired a dis..."*

(ii) The initial "th"

The initial "th" of *the, then, that, those, though, there, this, these* is pronounced as /d/. the students in this study frequently used the pronunciation in such expressions as "gimmee dat pencil" or "dis ain't right.".

(iii) The Final "th"

The final "-th" of *with, both, birth, mouth, truth*, etc., is sometimes pronounced as /f/. One of the 7th graders in the study who was most likely functioning at the 4th grade in his L1, was more noticeable with this particular pronunciation feature although it was used by the others sporadically. We see an example of the transference of /th/ to /f/ in the name of the national basketball player Anfernee (Anthony) Hardaway.

(iv) The medial "th"

The medial "th" of mother, other, brother (always voiced / / in Standard English, not voiceless / /, is pronounced as /v/. Although a characteristic of African American English pronunciation, it was not noticeable in any of the speech patterns of the students.

(v) The final /r/

The final "r" is "dropped," as in many other dialects of English; but in African American communities, this persists in geographic areas which do not have the feature otherwise. In the South, it is more widespread among African Americans than in the white community. As Labov (1972) points out, the "r-dropping" is also common in certain Northeastern United States dialects--which, however, often have a difference in the existence of "intrusive" /r/ *(idear of it)*. In at least some versions of African American English, intervocalic /r/ is "dropped," so that mad=/maed/; mired=/mad/and married=/maeid/ are almost identical sounds and differ only in the vowel nuclei which are so much alike, from the viewpoint of Standard English, that distinctions are not easily made. In almost all instances where the /r/ should be used in Standard English speech forms, most of the students habitually dropped it.

(vi) The range of vocal pitch

The range of vocal pitch is probably greater. There is not much in the phonological literature of African American English that addresses this subject. However, there is habitual use of beginning impressionistic statements with such words as "Niggah!" or "Cuz" or "Dawg", "My maan" These are all used very casually as terms of address as opposed to pejoratives.

(vii) Lexical items

Several features often referred to pronunciation are really matters of lexicon rather than of phonology. That is why some base forms of African American English are: des = desk; was = wasp; aks = ask (Dillard, 1972).

(viii) The use of profanity.

The aforementioned seven lexical differences were most obvious in the speech patterns in the classroom. If any correction is required, it should be on reducing the extensive use of profanity so prevalent today. This appeared to be a common and largely accepted (by fellow adolescents) feature of the speech patterns that the teacher observed, not only in the classroom but throughout the school in general. Although the researcher/teacher was initially surprised at the frequency of use, he gradually realized that it was not intended as a slight against anyone nor was it intended to have any pejorative or negative connotation. Most of the profanity was uttered in the context of casual conversation among the students themselves. It appeared to be such a normal part of discourse that the teacher often had to reprimand them for the use. The reaction was usually one of surprise, accompanied by phrases such as "Man, you have no ide' what's goin' on," or "what chu' talkin' bout? I ain't sed nuttin wron'." Although there were clearly language use implications arising from this persistent use of profanity, this issue is probably better addressed in a social-psychological context.

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